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ABSTRACT

This issue of the "NCEDL Spotlights" describes the content of a new book, "The Transition to Kindergarten," based on a national transitions synthesis conference sponsored by the National Center for Early Development and Learning. The document delineates the chapter topics and describes four trends expected to have significant effect on the transition of children into American schools in the near future. Topics of the book include early schooling and social stratification, readiness, education equity and excellence, teacher practices, issues for families, parent involvement, at-risk students, children with disabilities, low-income families, research design and methodology, personnel preparation, policy issues, and significant trends. (KB)

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NCEDL Spotlights

No. 20 March 2000

# New Book Examines Transition Issues

This *Spotlight* is based on ***The Transition to Kindergarten,*** a new 416-page book which is an outgrowth of a national transitions synthesis conference sponsored by NCEDL. Published by Brookes Publishing Co., Baltimore, the book contains 10 chapters commissioned, presented and examined at the conference and five more chapters that were written later and reflect the discussions and deliberations of the synthesis groups

## Education reform will likely include transition issues

"Our aim is this book is to provide a comprehensive treatment of an area of knowledge that has been neglected for too long and is need of systematic attention....We want to help organize and frame the debate on critical issues regarding the early primary education of an increasingly diverse group of young children."

The above quote is from the preface of a new book, ***The Transition to Kindergarten,*** which has been published as the first in a series by the National Center for Early Development & Learning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Editors Robert Pianta of the University of Virginia and Martha Cox of UNC-Chapel Hill said, "The education of young children is receiving an unprecedented level of attention in the United States and, for good or bad, will be a focus of educational reform as the twenty-first century begins. Understanding and influencing the transition from home to school, from child care to school, and from early childhood to elementary programs will likely be a focus of a great deal of attention in the policy, research, and practice communities."

### Chapter Topics

1. "An Ecological Approach to Kindergarten Transition" provides a conceptual model for looking at transitions.
2. "Early Schooling and Social Stratification" looks at how early school experiences provide advantages for some children and disadvantages for others that then reinforce the sorting of individuals into the hierarchical layers characteristic of societies.
3. "Assessing Readiness" examines the national "ready for school" goal and other key issues regarding readiness.
4. "Promoting Education Equity and Excellence in Kindergarten" looks at demographic trends and educational experiences by groups of children from different backgrounds and different kindergarten programs they attend.
5. "Diverse Perspectives on Kindergarten Contexts and Practices" focuses on research related to teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms.

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6. "Families and Schools: Rights, Responsibilities, Resources, and Relationships" reviews and identifies critical issues for families and schools in the context of children's transition to school.
7. "Changing Schools for Changing Families" examines the nature of, and barriers to, parent involvement and innovations in school-based support for families.
8. "Beginning School for Children at Risk" reviews why the transition to school for children in poverty is considered important for scientific inquiry, education improvement and societal concern.
9. "Children with Disabilities in Early Elementary School" looks at research and practices related to the transition to school-age services for young children with disabilities and their families.
10. "Kindergarten Practices with Children from Low-Income Families" discusses research on low- income children and families and implications for schools and classrooms.
11. "Research on the Transition to Kindergarten" examines how research design and methodology constrain the current knowledge base on transitions.
12. "Personnel Preparation and the Transition to Kindergarten" suggests a rethinking of the preparation of teachers and other staff serving children and their families.
13. "The Practice of Effective Transition" offers recommendations and rationales for practices for those involved in children's transition into kindergarten.
14. "Policy and the Transition Process" discusses specific issues with policy implications and advances a set of principles for analyzing policy related to transitions.
15. "The Changing Nature of the Transition to School" suggests significant trends for the next decade in relation to shifting demography, education of young children in public schools, and the changing nature of families and schools.

**Trends likely to affect transitions**

In the book's final chapter, the editors examine in detail four trends expected to have significant effect on the transition of children into American schools in the near future:

1. An emerging conceptual base that integrates developmental psychology and education is fueling increased recognition by educators that a) the development of young children (younger than 8) relies greatly on contexts and b) the early grades of school are a different and somewhat critical period for later school success.
2. The diversity of America's families and school population is increasing rapidly and likely to be most pronounced among the younger age groups of children.
3. The phenomenon of public schools offering programs for 4-year-olds, which was started in the 1980s mostly for children with high-risk backgrounds, will expand to near-universal status and radically change the nature of transition to school. The elementary school of the future is likely to run from age 3 through third grade. Policies concerning the age and circumstances under which children enter schools will be transformed in response to whether preK programs are universal or offered only on a selected basis.
4. The accountability movement is likely to produce serious tensions for educators interested in transition. The movement offers potential for enhancing the quality of education, but has also ushered in a rash of new testing and assessment. Some group-administered standardized tests are not consistent with the emerging conceptual model that underlies most educational practice for young children.

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